

RESPONSIBILITY  
◆◆◆ AND ◆◆◆  
JUDGMENT

Hannah Arendt

Edited and with an Introduction  
by Jerome Kohn



SCHOCKEN BOOKS, NEW YORK

## SOME QUESTIONS OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY

### I

The thoughts of many of us, I suppose, have wandered back during the last weeks to Winston Spencer Churchill, the greatest statesman thus far of our century, who just died after an incredibly long life, the summit of which was reached at the threshold of old age. This happenstance, if such it was, like almost everything he stood for in his convictions, in his writings, in the grand but not grandiose manner of his speeches, stood in conspicuous contrast to whatever we may think the Zeitgeist of this age to be. It is perhaps this contrast that touches us most when we consider his greatness. He has been called a figure of the eighteenth century driven into the twentieth as though the virtues of the past had taken over our destinies in their most desperate crisis, and this, I think, is true as far as it goes. But perhaps there is more to it. It is as though, in this shifting of centuries, some permanent eminence of the human spirit flashed up for an historically brief moment to show that whatever makes for greatness—nobility, dignity, steadfastness, and a kind of laughing courage—remains essentially the same throughout the centuries.

Still Churchill, so old-fashioned or, as I have suggested, beyond the fashions of the times, was by no means unaware of the deci-

including the possible inhabitants of another planet or angels, is free from being affected by anything but itself. And since freedom is defined as *not* being determined by external causes, only a will free from inclination can be called good and free. We found the evasion of evil in this philosophy to reside in the assumption that the will cannot be free and wicked at the same time. Wickedness in Kant's term is an *absurdum morale*, a moral absurdity.<sup>11</sup>

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates proposes three highly paradoxical statements: (1) It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong; (2) It is better for the doer to be punished than to go unpunished; and (3) The tyrant who can do with impunity whatever he pleases is an unhappy man. We shall not be concerned with the last of these statements, and only touch upon the second. We have lost the ear for the paradoxical nature of such statements. It is pointed out to Socrates by Polus, one of his interlocutors, that he "says such things as no human being would utter" (*Gorgias* 473e) and Socrates does not deny this. On the contrary, he is convinced that all Athenians will agree with Polus, and that he is "left alone, unable to agree" with them (472b); and yet he believes every man actually does agree with him—without knowing it—just as the Great King and the bad tyrant never discovered they were the most miserable of all men. Throughout the dialogue runs the conviction of all concerned that every man wishes and does what he thinks is best for himself; it is taken for granted that what is best for the individual is also good for the commonwealth and the question of what to do in case of a conflict is nowhere explicitly raised. Those engaged in the dialogue are to decide what constitutes happiness and what misery, and to call upon the opinions of the many, of numbers, is like letting children form a tribunal about matters of health and dieting, when the physician is in the

dock and the cook draws up the indictment. Nothing that Socrates says in support of his paradoxes convinces his adversaries even for a moment, and the whole enterprise ends like the much greater enterprise of the *Republic*, with Socrates telling a “myth” which he believes is a “logos,” that is, a reasoned argument, and which he tells Callicles as if it were the truth (*Georgias* 523a–527b). And then you read the tale, perhaps an old wives’ tale, about life after death: death is the separation of body and soul, when the soul, stripped of its body, appears naked before an equally bodiless judge, “soul itself piercing very soul” (523e). After this comes the parting of the ways, one to the Island of the Blessed, and the other to Tartarus and the punishment of crooked, ugly souls, stained with the scars of crimes. Some of these will be improved by the punishment while the worst are made examples to be beheld by others, presumably in a sort of Purgatory, “that they may see what they suffer and fear and become better” (525b). And it is clear that Tartarus will be well-populated and the Blessed Island almost a desert, most likely inhabited by a few “philosophers who did not engage in many activities during their lifetimes, and were not busybodies, but concerned themselves only with what regarded them” (526c).

The two statements which are at stake: that it is better for a wrongdoer to be punished than to go unpunished, and that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, do not at all belong in the same category, and the myth, strictly speaking, refers only to the paradox about punishment. It spins out a metaphor introduced earlier in the dialogue, the metaphor of a healthy and a diseased or crooked soul taken over from the state of the body, which permits Plato to liken punishment to the taking of medicine. It is unlikely that this metaphorical way of speaking about the soul is Socratic. It was Plato who first developed a doctrine of the soul;

and it is equally unlikely that Socrates, who in distinction to Plato was certainly not a poet, ever told such pretty tales. For our purposes, we shall retain only the following points of the myth: first, that these myths always occur after it has become quite obvious that all attempts to convince have failed, and hence as a kind of alternative to reasoned argument; second, that their underlying tenor invariably says that if you cannot be convinced by what I say, it would be better for you to believe in the following tale; and, third, that of all people it is the philosopher who arrives at the Island of the Blessed.

Let us now turn our attention to this inability to convince, on one side, and to the unshaken conviction of Socrates that he is right even though he admits that the whole world stands against him, on the other. Quite at the end of the dialogue he admits even a bit more: he concedes stupidity and ignorance (*apaideusia*) (527d–e), and by no means ironically. We talk about these matters, he says, like children who can never hold the same opinion on the same issue for any length of time, but change their minds constantly. (“For it seems to me shameful that, being what apparently at this moment we are, we should consider ourselves to be fine fellows, when we can never hold to the same views about the same questions—and those too the most vital of all—so deplorably uneducated are we!” [527d]) But the matters at stake here are not child’s play; on the contrary, they are “the greatest” matters. This admission that we change our minds about moral matters is very serious. Socrates seems to agree here with his opponents who hold that only the might-is-right doctrine is “natural,” that everything else, and especially all laws, are by convention only, and that conventions change from place to place and from time to time. So that “what is right (*ta dikaia*) has no natural existence at all, that men are perpetually disputing about rights

and altering them, and whatever alteration they make at any time is at that time authoritative, owing its existence to artifice and legislation, and not in any way to nature" (*Laws* 889e–890a).

I have quoted to you from Plato's last work, in which Socrates does not appear, but which makes clear allusion to the *Gorgias*. Here Plato has abandoned both the Socratic belief in the wholesome effect of discourse and his own earlier conviction that one must invent, as it were, a myth with which to threaten the multitude. Persuasion, he says, will not be possible, because these things seem hard to understand, "not to mention that it would require a dismal length of time." He therefore proposes that the "laws be written down" because then they will be "always at rest." The laws, of course, will again be man-made and not "natural," but they will conform to what Plato called Ideas; and while wise men will know that the laws are not "natural" and everlasting—only a human imitation—the multitude will end by believing that they are, because they are "at rest" and do not change. These laws are not the truth, but they are not mere conventions either. Conventions are arrived at by consent, the consensus of the people, and you will remember that in the *Gorgias* Socrates' opponents are described as "lovers of the *demos*, the people," true democrats, we may say, against whom Socrates describes himself as the lover of philosophy, which does not say one thing today and another tomorrow, but always the same thing. But it is philosophy, not Socrates, that is unchanging and always the same, and though Socrates confesses to being in love with wisdom, he most emphatically denies that he is wise: his wisdom consists merely in knowing that no mortal can be wise.

It is precisely on this point that Plato parted company with Socrates. In the doctrine of Ideas, which is exclusively Platonic and not Socratic, and which for these purposes you find best

expounded in the *Republic*, Plato taught the separate existence of a realm of Ideas, or Forms, in which such things as Justice, Goodness, etc. "exist by nature with a being of their own." Not through discourse, but by looking toward these Forms, visible to the eyes of the mind, the philosopher is informed by Truth, and through his soul, which is invisible and imperishable—as contrasted with the body which is both visible and perishable, and subject to constant change—he partakes of the invisible, imperishable, unchangeable Truth. He partakes of it, that is, through seeing and beholding it, not through reasoning and argument. When I told you of the self-evidence of general moral statements, of their compelling nature for those who perceive them and of the impossibility of proving their axiomatic verity to those who do not perceive them, I was talking in Platonic rather than Socratic terms. Socrates believed in the spoken word, that is, in the argument which can be arrived at by reasoning, and such reasoning can proceed only in a sequence of spoken statements. These statements must follow each other logically, they must not contradict each other. The aim, as he says in the *Gorgias*, is "to fix and bind them . . . in words which are like bonds of iron and adamant so that neither you nor anybody else will be able to break them." Everybody who can speak and is aware of the rules of contradiction should then be bound by the final conclusion. The early Platonic dialogues could easily be read as a great series of refutations of this belief; the trouble is precisely that words and arguments cannot be "fixed with iron bonds." This is not possible because they "move around" (*Euthyphro*), because the reasoning process itself is without end. Within the realm of words, and all thinking as a process is a process of speaking, we shall never find an iron rule by which to determine what is right and what is wrong with the same certainty with which we determine—to use again

Socratic or Platonic examples—what is small and big through number, what is heavy and light through weight, where the standard or measurement is always the same. Plato's doctrine of Ideas introduced such standards and measurements into philosophy, and the whole problem of how to tell right from wrong now boiled down to whether or not I am in possession of the standard or the "idea" which I must apply in each particular case. Hence, for Plato, the whole question of who will and who won't behave according to moral precepts ultimately is decided by the kind of "soul" a man possesses, and this soul allegedly can be made better through punishment.

You find this point made very explicitly in the *Republic*, where Socrates encounters in Thrasymachus the same difficulties he encounters in Callicles in the *Gorgias*. Thrasymachus holds that that which is in the interest of the ruler is called "just"; "just" is nothing but the name given by those holding power to any action they enjoin by law upon their subjects. Callicles, on the contrary, had explained that laws, mere conventions, are made by the weak majority to protect them against the few who are strong. The two theories are only seemingly in opposition: the question of right and wrong in both instances is a question of power, and we can switch without difficulties from the *Gorgias* to the *Republic* in this respect (although by no means in others). In the *Republic*, there are two disciples of Socrates present at the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus, and they are no more convinced by Socrates' arguments than Thrasymachus himself. Hence they plead Thrasymachus' cause. Socrates, after hearing them, exclaims, "There must indeed be some divine quality in your nature [*physis*, see *Republic* 367e], if you can plead the cause of injustice so eloquently and still not be convinced yourselves that it is better than justice." Socrates, having failed to con-



vince his own disciples, is at a loss what to do next. And he turns from his strictly moral quest (as we now would say) to the political question of which is the best form of government, giving as his excuse that it is easier to read large letters than small ones, and assuming that he will find in an examination of the state the same traits he wanted to analyze in persons—since the state is only the man writ large. In our context, it is decisive that it is clearly their own nature that has convinced Glaucon and Adeimantus of the truth that justice is better than injustice; but when it comes to arguing about the matter, they are not convinced by Socrates' arguments and show that they can argue very well and very convincingly against what they know to be true. It is not the *logos* that convinces them, but what they see with the eyes of the mind, and the Parable of the Cave is also in part a tale of the impossibility of translating convincingly such seen evidence into words and arguments.

If you think these matters through, you will easily arrive at the Platonic solution: those few whose nature, the nature of their souls, lets them see the truth, don't need any obligation, any "Thou Shalt—or else," because what matters is self-evident. And since those who don't see the truth can't be convinced by arguments, some means has to be found to make them behave, to force them to act, without being convinced—as though they, too, had "seen." These means are of course those myths of a hereafter, which Plato used to conclude many of the dialogues that treat of moral and political matters—stories which he introduces in the beginning rather diffidently, perhaps only as old wives' tales, and finally in his last work (the *Laws*) abandons altogether.

I have dwelt on the Platonic teaching to show you how matters stand—or shall we say stood?—if you don't put your trust in conscience. Its etymological origin notwithstanding (that is, its

original identity with consciousness), conscience acquired its specific moral character only when it was understood as an organ through which man hears the word of God rather than his own words. Hence, if we wish to talk about these matters in secular terms, we have very little to fall back on other than ancient, pre-Christian philosophy. And isn't it striking that you find here, in the midst of philosophic thought which is in no way bound by any religious dogma, a doctrine of hell, purgatory, and paradise, complete with a Last Judgment, rewards and punishments, the distinction between venial and mortal sins, and the rest of it? The only thing which you will look for in vain is the notion that sins can be forgiven.

However we wish to interpret this astounding fact, let us be clear about one thing: that ours is the first generation since the rise of Christianity in the West in which the masses, and not only a small elite, no longer believe in "future states" (as the Founding Fathers still put it) and who therefore are committed (it would seem) to think of conscience as an organ that will react without hope for rewards and without fear of punishment. Whether people still believe that this conscience is informed by some divine voice is, to say the very least, open to doubt. The fact that all our legal institutions, insofar as they are concerned with criminal acts, still rely on such an organ to inform every man of right and wrong, even though he may not be conversant with books of law, is no argument for its existence. Institutions frequently long survive the basic principles on which they are founded.

But let us return to Socrates, who knew nothing of Plato's doctrine of Ideas, and hence nothing of the axiomatic, nondiscursive self-evidence of things seen with the eyes of the mind. In the *Gorgias* Socrates, confronted with the paradoxical nature of his statement and his inability to convince, makes the following reply: he

first says that Callicles will “not be in agreement with himself but that throughout his life he will contradict himself.” And then he adds that as far as he himself is concerned he believes that “it would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I direct were out of tune and loud with discord, and that most men should not agree with me and contradict me, rather than that I, being one, should be out of tune with myself and contradict myself” (482b–c). The key notion in this sentence is “*I who am one,*” which is unfortunately left out in many English translations. The meaning is clear: even though I am one, I am not simply one, I have a self and I am related to this self as my own self. This self is by no means an illusion; it makes itself heard by talking to me—I talk to myself, I am not only aware of myself—and in this sense, though I am one, I am two-in-one and there can be harmony or disharmony with the self. If I disagree with other people, I can walk away; but I cannot walk away from myself, and therefore I better first try to be in agreement with myself before I take all others into consideration. This same sentence also spells out the actual reason it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong: if I do wrong I am condemned to live together with a wrongdoer in an unbearable intimacy; I can never get rid of him. Hence the crime that remains hidden from the eyes of gods and men, a crime that does not appear at all because there is no one to whom it appears and which you’ll find mentioned in Plato time and again, actually does not exist: as I am my own partner when I am thinking, I am my own witness when I am acting. I know the agent and am condemned to live together with him. He is not silent. This is the only reason Socrates ever gives, and the question is both why this reason does not convince his opponent and why it is a sufficient reason for those people whom Plato in the *Republic* calls men endowed with a noble nature. But please be aware that Socrates

### *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*

here talks about something else altogether: it is not a question of seeing something imperishable and divine outside yourself, for whose apperception you need a special organ, just as you need eyesight for perceiving the visible world around you. With Socrates, no special organ is needed because you remain within yourself and no transcendent standard, as we would say, or nothing outside yourself, received with the eyes of the mind, informs you of right and wrong. To be sure, it is difficult if not impossible to convince others in discourse of the truth of the statement, but you yourself have arrived at it for the sake of this living with yourself that becomes manifest in discourse between you and yourself. If you are at odds with your self it is as though you were forced to live and have daily intercourse with your own enemy. No one can want that. If you do wrong you live together with a wrongdoer, and while many prefer to do wrong for their own benefit rather than suffer wrong, no one will prefer to live together with a thief or a murderer or a liar. This is what people forget who praise the tyrant who has come into power through murder and fraud.

In the *Gorgias*, there exists only one short reference to what this relationship between the I and the Self, between me and myself, consists of. And I therefore turn to another dialogue, the *Theaetetus*, the dialogue on knowledge, where Socrates gives a clear account of it. He wishes to explain what he understands by *dianoesthai*, to think a matter through, and he says: "I call it a discourse that the mind carries on with itself about any subject it is considering. And I'll explain it to you though I am not too sure about it myself. It looks to me as though this is nothing else but *dialegesthai*, talking something through, only that the mind asks itself questions and answers them, saying yes or no to itself. Then it arrives at the limit where things must be decided, when the two say the same and are no longer uncertain, which we then set down

as the mind's opinion. Making up one's mind and forming an opinion I thus call discourse, and the opinion itself I call a spoken statement, pronounced not to someone else and aloud but silently to oneself." And you find the same description in almost identical words in the *Sophist*: thought and spoken statement are the same, except that the thought is a dialogue carried on by the mind with itself without sound, and opinion is the end of this dialogue. That a wrongdoer will not be a very good partner for this silent dialogue seems rather obvious.<sup>12</sup>

From what we know of the historical Socrates it seems likely that he who spent his days in the marketplace—the same marketplace which Plato's philosopher shuns explicitly (*Theaetetus*)—must have believed that all men do not have an innate voice of conscience, but feel the need to talk matters through; that all men talk to themselves. Or, to put it more technically, that all men are two-in-one, not only in the sense of consciousness and self-consciousness (that whatever I do I am at the same time somehow aware of doing it), but in the very specific and active sense of this silent dialogue, of having constant intercourse, of being on speaking terms with themselves. If they only knew what they were doing, so Socrates must have thought, they would understand how important it was for them to do nothing that could spoil it. If the faculty of speech distinguishes man from other animal species—and this is what the Greeks actually believed and what Aristotle later said in his famous definition of man—then it is this silent dialogue of myself with myself in which my specifically human quality is proved. In other words, Socrates believed that men are not merely rational animals but thinking beings, and that they would rather give up all other ambitions and even suffer injury and insult than to forfeit this faculty.

The first to differ was Plato, as we saw, who expected to see only philosophers—who made thinking their special business—

### *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*

on the Island of the Blessed. And since it is impossible to deny that no other human activity demands so peremptorily and inevitably the intercourse of myself with myself than the silent dialogue of thought, and since, after all, thinking does not belong among the most frequent and most common occupations of men, we have a natural tendency to agree with him. Except we forget that we, who no longer believe in thinking as a common human habit, still uphold that even the most common men should be aware of what is right and what is wrong, and should agree with Socrates that it is better to suffer than to do wrong. The political concern is not whether the act of striking somebody unjustly or of being struck unjustly is more disgraceful. The concern is exclusively with having a world in which such acts do not occur (*Gorgias* 508).

Let me indicate some of the directions into which these considerations may lead us with respect to the perplexities I stated at the beginning.

The reason moral philosophy, though dealing with the "greatest matters," never found a name adequate to its high purpose may reside in the fact that the philosophers could not think of it as a separate section of philosophy, like logic, cosmology, ontology, etc. If the moral precept rises out of the thinking activity itself, if it is the implied condition of the silent dialogue between me and myself, on whatever issue, then it is rather the prephilosophical condition of philosophy itself, and a condition therefore which philosophic thought shares with all other, nontechnical ways of thinking. For the objects of this activity are of course by no means restricted to specifically philosophic or, for that matter, scientific topics. Thinking as an activity can arise out of every occurrence; it is present when I, having watched an incident in the street or having become implicated in some occurrence, now start considering what has happened, telling it to myself as a kind of story,

preparing it in this way for its subsequent communication to others, and so forth. The same is of course even truer if the topic of my silent consideration happens to be something I have done myself. To do wrong means to spoil this ability; the safest way for the criminal never to be detected and to escape punishment is to forget what he did, and not to think about it any more. By the same token, we may say that repentance first of all consists in not forgetting what one did, in "returning to it," as the Hebrew verb *shuv* indicates. This connection of thinking and remembering is especially important in our context. No one can remember what he has not thought through in talking about it with himself.

However, while thinking in this nontechnical sense is certainly no prerogative of any special kind of men, philosophers or scientists, etc.—you find it present in all walks of life and may find it entirely absent in what we call intellectuals—it cannot be denied that it certainly is much less frequent than Socrates supposed, although one hopes a bit more frequent than Plato feared. No doubt I can refuse to think and to remember and still remain quite normally human. The danger, however, not only for myself, whose speech, having forfeited the highest actualization of the human capacity for speech, will therefore become meaningless, but also for others who are forced to live with a possibly highly intelligent and still entirely thoughtless creature, is very great. If I refuse to remember, I am actually ready to do anything—just as my courage would be absolutely reckless if pain, for instance, were an experience immediately forgotten.

This question of remembrance brings us at least one small step nearer to the bothersome question of the nature of evil. Philosophy (and also great literature, as I mentioned before) knows the villain only as somebody who is in despair and whose despair

is a kind  
of

sheds a certain nobility about him. I am not going to deny that this type of evildoer exists, but I am certain that the greatest evils we know of are not due to him who has to face himself again and whose curse is that he cannot forget. The greatest evildoers are those who don't remember because they have never given thought to the matter, and, without remembrance, nothing can hold them back. For human beings, thinking of past matters means moving in the dimension of depth, striking roots and thus stabilizing themselves, so as not to be swept away by whatever may occur—the Zeitgeist or History or simple temptation. The greatest evil is not radical, it has no roots, and because it has no roots it has no limitations, it can go to unthinkable extremes and sweep over the whole world.

I mentioned the quality of being a person as distinguished from being merely human (as the Greeks distinguished themselves as logon echon from the barbarians), and I said that to speak about a moral personality is almost a redundancy. Taking our cue from Socrates' justification of his moral proposition, we may now say that in this process of thought in which I actualize the specifically human difference of speech, I explicitly constitute myself a person, and I shall remain one to the extent that I am capable of such constitution ever again and anew. If this is what we commonly call personality, and it has nothing to do with gifts and intelligence, it is the simple, almost automatic result of thoughtfulness. To put it another way, in granting pardon, it is the person and not the crime that is forgiven; in rootless evil there is no person left whom one could ever forgive.

It is in this connection that the curious insistence of all moral and religious thought on the importance of self-attachment may per-



haps be a bit better understood. It is not a question of loving myself as I may love others, but of being more dependent on this silent partner I carry with myself, more at his mercy, as it were, than is perhaps the case with anybody else. The fear of losing oneself is legitimate, for it is the fear of no longer being able to talk with oneself. And not only grief and sorrow but also joy and happiness and all the other emotions would be altogether unbearable if they had to remain mute, inarticulate.

But there is still another side to this matter. The Socratic-Platonic description of the process of thinking seems to me so important because it implies, albeit only in passing, the fact that men exist in the plural and not in the singular, that men and not Man inhabit the earth. Even if we are by ourselves, when we articulate or actualize this being-alone we find that we are in company, in the company of ourselves. Loneliness, that nightmare which, as we all know, can very well overcome us in the midst of a crowd, is precisely this being deserted by oneself, the temporary inability to become two-in-one, as it were, while in a situation where there is no one else to keep us company. Seen from this viewpoint, it is indeed true that my conduct toward others will depend on my conduct toward myself. Only no specific content, no special duties and obligations are involved, nothing indeed but the sheer capacity of thought and remembrance, or its loss.

Let me finally remind you of those murderers in the Third Reich who led not only an impeccable family life but liked to spend their leisure time reading Hölderlin and listening to Bach, proving (as though proof in this matter had been lacking before) that intellectuals can as easily be led into crime as anybody else. But aren't sensitivity, and a feeling for the so-called higher things in life, mental capacities? They certainly are, but this capacity for appreciation has

## *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*

nothing whatever to do with thought, which, as we must remember, is an *activity* and not the passive enjoyment of something. Insofar as thinking is an activity, it can be translated into products, into such things as poems or music or paintings. All things of this kind are actually thought-things just as furniture and the objects of our daily use are rightly called use-objects: the ones are inspired by thought and the others are inspired by usage, by some human need and want. The point about these highly cultivated murderers is that there has been not a single one of them who wrote a poem worth remembering or a piece of music worth listening to or painted a picture that anybody would care to hang on his walls. More than thoughtfulness is needed to write a good poem or piece of music, or to paint a picture—you need special gifts. But no gifts will withstand the loss of integrity which you lose when you have lost this most common capacity for thought and remembrance.

### III *Ethics and Philosophy*

~~Morality concerns the individual in his singularity. The criterion of right and wrong, the answer to the question, what ought I to do? depends in the last analysis neither on habits and customs, which I share with those around me, nor on a command of either divine or human origin, but on what I decide with regard to myself. In other words, I cannot do certain things, because having done them I shall no longer be able to live with myself. This living with myself is more than consciousness, more than the self-awareness that accompanies me in whatever I do and in whichever state I am. To be with myself and to judge by myself is articulated and actualized in the processes of thought, and every thought process is an activity in which I speak with myself about~~

frankly heretical. In one of the so-called sayings that are preserved (and which actually are anecdotes), Eckhart is supposed to have met the happiest man, who turns out to be a beggar. The argument goes back and forth until finally the beggar is asked if he would still think himself happy if he should find himself in hell. And the beggar who has based his arguments on his love of God and the assumption that I have present with me whatever I love, answers, Oh, yes, "I'd much rather be in hell with God than in heaven without Him." The point is that both Cicero and Eckhart agree that there comes a point where all objective standards—truth, rewards and punishments in a hereafter, etc.—yield precedence to the "subjective" criterion of the kind of person I wish to be and live together with.

If you apply these sayings to the question of the nature of evil, the result would be a definition of the agent, and how he did it rather than of the act itself or of its final result. And you will find this shift from the objective *what* somebody did to the subjective *who* of the agent as a marginal datum even in our legal system. For if it is true that we indict somebody for what he did, it is equally true that when a murderer is pardoned, one no longer takes this deed into consideration. It is not murder which is forgiven but the killer, his person as it appears in circumstances and intentions. The trouble with the Nazi criminals was precisely that they renounced voluntarily all personal qualities, as if nobody were left to be either punished or forgiven. They protested time and again that they had never done anything out of their own initiative, that they had no intentions whatsoever, good or bad, and that they only obeyed orders.

To put it another way: the great evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons. Within the conceptual framework of these considera-

KB

tions we could say that wrongdoers who refuse to think by themselves what they are doing and who also refuse in retrospect to think about it, that is, go back and remember what they did (which is *teshuvah* or repentance), have actually failed to constitute themselves into somebodies. By stubbornly remaining nobodies they prove themselves unfit for intercourse with others who, good, bad, or indifferent, are at the very least persons.

Everything we have discovered until now is negative. We have dealt with an activity and not with action, and the ultimate standard has been the relation toward our own self, not the relation toward others. We shall now turn our attention to action as distinguished from activity and to conduct toward others as distinguished from intercourse with oneself. In both instances we shall remain restricted to moral issues; we shall stick to men in their singularity and leave out of account all political issues such as the constitution of communities and government as well as the citizen's support of the laws of his country or his action in concert with his fellow citizens in support of a common enterprise. Hence, I shall talk about nonpolitical action, which does not take place in public, and about nonpolitical relations to others which are neither relations to other selves, i.e., friends, nor predetermined by some common worldly interest. The two phenomena that will chiefly claim our attention are actually interconnected. The first is the phenomenon of the *will*, which, according to our tradition, stirs me into action, and the second is the question of the nature of the good in an entirely positive sense, rather than the negative question of how to prevent evil.

I mentioned previously that the phenomenon of the will was unknown to antiquity. But before trying to determine its historical origin, which is of considerable interest, I'll try very briefly to give you a short analysis of its function with regard to the other